

Last Flight

by Mac

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> <meta name="Generator"> A long time ago in a galaxy far, far awayâ€|

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STAR WARS

- Last Flight -

by

Doug Mac Donald

I had nearly twenty-five years with the Imperial Navy, carrying out the Emperor's New Order, and I ended up running from it. I gave the final order, the order that destroyed the lives of nearly three hundred Mon Calamari rebel sympathizers in a single fiery moment. A single word and they were all dead. And I would do it again, if given the chance. 'I was just following orders' is such a simple-minded defense, and I suppose others will claim such, but not I. The Emperor gave the order, and I carried it out. With a wave of my hand and that single word I wielded the ultimate power in the universe and relished in it. As Moff I could have objected to the order, or at least stated for the record my opposition to it. The first blast I did for my mentor Admiral Motti who did not live to see that day (and in hindsight, thankfully so).

> The second I did for me.
 Even when the rebel spies blew the shield generator I was prepared to stay and fight. So they lowered our main defense, what did that matter against such a massive weapon of destruction, and the best fighter pilots the Imperial Navy had to offer? Even when they made that fateful run down the reactor shaft I could not find it in me to flee. Tarkin went down with his station,

and I would do the same. Shame is death in disguise. And yet when the first explosion rocked the station, I found myself sprinting through the unfinished corridors to my private shuttle.

> An imperial officer does not run, they walk.
 They do not panic, they remain calm.

> The looks of disgust and anger on my officer's faces haunt me to this day. If they had a blaster in their hand any one of them would have shot me; and I would have thanked them.
 Be that as it may, I was knocking down troopers, screaming at the dullards to move out of my way. Along the way, through the sparking and flickering florescent lighting, I managed to pull two pilots whom I knew I could trust, with me. In my flight I hadn't immediately noticed the dark shadow lying on the docking bay's deck plates. I stared through the shuttle viewscreens in disbelief, and felt another wave of horror clasp my throat. I could only assume there was a rebel spy aboard my station and was now pulling Darth Vader aboard another shuttle. I looked around as my shuttle lifted, it was every man for themselves, and none stopped to help the Sith Lord they had sworn to obey with such blind singularity.

> The ship rocked as the station trembled from deep within its bowels, and as we blasted away from the sinking station, I could not restrain the shudder that chilled my very core. Something had happened to Vader, something devastating for some rebel to pull him helplessly across the bay. No one dared go up against Vader, nothing phased the Dark Lord, and yet here he was, being dragged like a freight of cargo. I held no love for that mechanical aberration, but at that moment I found some pity for him. He would be taken before the rebel leaders and held on trial for his crimes, his thousands upon thousands of crimes. His jail would not be a pleasant one, far worse than Kessel ever was. And his punishment? Who knew what the rebels would do to this man?
 I could no longer breath as the shuttle made its way into the center of the fighting. Star Destroyers and capital warships faced off against each other, blasting away above our heads. Dogfights ended in fiery displays. I stumbled out of my seat and into the cargo hold and retched into an empty crate. What would they do to the man who fired upon two Calamari cruisers, decimating them in seconds? Why did I flee? There was no hope for escape, and with the Emperor dead; Coruscant would fall soon enough. I no longer had a home, no where to turn.

> My anger won over, however as I returned to my seat in time to watch the rebel fleet retreat from the battle station. Star Destroyers leapt into hyperspace into a hundred different directions. As the starlines pulled back into silver daggers I could at least find solace in the fact that when the Death Star blew, it would still take some of the rebels with it. Not to mention how the burning metal would scar the surface of Endor. Thankfully we were away before I could see my long tour of duty with the Galactic Empire go up in flames. <p>

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>Finding refuge after the war was difficult, but over the years I managed to accumulate more wealth than entire star systems could boast. Wealth will always buy silence, sanctuary and comfort. During the ten years I had spent as Governor of the Riordan system, far away in the outer rim, I owned a private excavation company that mined for Chirsopa. Chirsopa is a metallic element discovered deep in Riordan's vast oceans, used to make high strength cutting tools. Although I have never understood the primitive Rior works of art, I did own

several exquisite (at least that is what the appraisers referred to them as) sculptures and paintings. I acquired a substantial fortune there, but nothing would compare to the wealth that came to me when I was commissioned by the Emperor's Grand Vizier to oversee the construction and operation of the second Death Star.
 I still dream of the Emperor, and to a lesser extent, his dog Vader. It was the single most wanted commission in the Empire, the position of Moff was everything I had ever wanted. I killed more men through exhaustion trying to meet with the Emperor's impossible deadlines, although now that I reflect back on it all, I don't believe it was the Emperor who set those impossible goals to complete the battle station. It was Vader all along, trying to please his master like an obedient Ewok, by completing the main battery for the attack on the Rebellion.

> Each morning I wake up, the Emperor's yellow eyes blaze like golden suns in the back of my mind, that pale skeletal face grinning at my fear. After so many years, you would think that I would get used to waking up in a cold sweat, heart hammering like a concussion missile. Used to the fact that I walked with living death. How those eyes pierced you, saw through you. When I was before him, I could not eat hours before or hours after; his presence was that distasteful. Ashen was the color of my skin.

>
 The years following my flight were unkind, despite my influence. I spent an entire month in the hold of a freighter; while the hired pilots attempted to smuggle me out of the inner core to Boarion, a system that has little tolerance for aliens. Boarion was a wonderful place to live amongst one's own kind. Yet each night I dreamt of the Mon Calamari, hundreds of dead fish-eyed creatures screaming out all at once, knowing it was I who had them permanently silenced. More often than not I would wake up, a scream at my throat, my hair matted with sweat; the dreams took a disconcerting turn. Instead of dreaming of those lives I had ended, I watched as I commanded the helm of a Mon Cal battle cruiser. Still giving the order to fire, the ship tears apart all around me, I can feel the heat of the flames engulf my flesh, while the aliens around me are unscathed. With their cold fish eyes they watched as I burned into nothingness.

> In another dream I still command that same vessel I had destroyed so many years ago, but this time the ship was fleeing, away from the Death Star. Away from the Empire, Vader and the Emperor. My screams woke me from the dream, as my shaking and uncertain fingers clawed at the invisible hand that was clasped around my neck.
 Although we monitored a different Rebel frequency, I never heard their short screams. And yet each night I imagine with unequivocal clarity the dead screaming out to me, their voices rising like a medieval choir and then suddenly silenced like the vacuum of space. Sometimes when I walk through a crowd, the background noise sounds like the moaning of those who do not know that they are dead. But let them try and torment me, I am an Imperial Commander, with the benefit of the Empire's military training behind me. I do not scare easily. Nor do I regret any past decision that I made.

* * * * *

>The first time I saw a Calamari after my escape occurred only three months after. Boarion had relatively few alien visitors mainly due to the dominant human population, occasionally some delegates would arrive perhaps to have dealings with the government, or for business matters. A Devaronian once purchased a manufacturing plant for a

hefty sum not far from my residence. The owner of the plant soon disappeared after that and the plant was shut down, the Devaronian never to be seen planetside again. The Calamari that arrived that day was a wealthy landowner and as I later found out was looking to sell a large portion of his properties that he had owned on Boarion.
 My throat seized when I first caught a glimpse of him in the docking bay, I was on my way to purchase a new supervisor droid when the Calamari stopped, his yellow eyes fell upon mine and they locked together for that single moment. I saw recognition enter his face at once; my breath came back to me in an instant. I fled once more, turned and ran the opposite direction, ducking down alleyways and pushing people out of my way, sure that the Rebellion had found me. I hid in a warehouse not far from my residence, watching the roads and airways with quick and darting eyes. I stayed that way, hidden in the dusty murkiness for nearly five hours, my heart skipping with every speeder that seemed to slow as it passed by.

> I could not sleep that night, but instead sat by the front door, blaster in hand, ears tuned to the slightest noise outside. I dreamt of a brook that night, surrounded by a grove of ch'hala trees, their leathery leaves made shadows along the bank of the brook, flickering as a light wind stirred the flowing water. But I soon realized they were not the shadows of leaves I was watching, as the sun appeared above, shining directly on the surface of the water, I could see eyes peering out at me, hundreds of eyes, swimming down the stream, staring up at their killer. My only reaction was to throw a stone at the phantom images, but as the water splashed into the air, I could only hear the moaning of Calamari.
 As it turned out, the Mon Cal did not recognize me, and so my identity remained a secret. After that incident very few aliens visited Boarion, and nearly eleven months would pass, time enough to forget the way my heart seized at the mere sight of the water creatures. My mind had simply accepted that the Rebellion had not found me, and never would, if I continued to be careful. The pilots who had transported me here expired along with the shuttle in a most unfortunate accident. I changed my name and had a beautifully forged birth certificate and credentials. A few more species were sighted, a couple of Duros, a single Amanin, Twi'lek and another Mon Cal. The fear of being caught rushed through my being, making me physically ill. I hid again, could not eat for days, and as I sat there trembling, blaster gripped tightly in my hand I decided I could not continue in this manner. I could not scurry away like a womprat each time one of those vile creatures came my way. The rebels would come for me one day, and I had to be prepared for that. But in the meantime I would not let those salmon-colored interlopers dictate my freedom.

> I purchased a CP-38 droid for far too much, not as worthy as the old A.V. models we used aboard the Death Star, but it would serve its single purpose well. The next several months were spent waiting impatiently as my specifications were met on the CP unit, among other little necessary arrangements.
 Again, there was a dry spell of several months before my next sighting, and this time I was prepared. This Mon Cal was wealthy by any standards, as though they could fit in here on Boarion like a common human. Jeavar was the creature's name, and it came into port in one of those twelve hundred-meter-long capital abominations. I sneered at the sight of the vessel, wishing to see the now-converted luxury cruiser go head to head against a Destroyer and a squadron of Interceptors. I knew I could not act against Jeavar, without arousing suspicion of my background and current activities. And yet the Mon Cal known as Jeavar was found only a few hours after docking, the creature's body had been strung up against the warship's communications tower; the wire used had cut

into its flesh until its body looked as though it were covered with blood-red gills. Its clothes had been removed, its leathery skin naked to all that could see. From what I heard, anyone of the bridge would have seen Jeavar's corpse with little difficulty. The worst part, was the absence of Jeavar's eyes, leaving behind twin inky wells staring into oblivion.

> Suffice to say, Boarion never had another Mon Cal visitor in the many years I had spent there, and after that incident there were even fewer Sullusts. After another year had passed, I felt myself beginning to breathe again and I relished each breath. There was no investigation to speak of, and I doubt anything would have been found given the fact there has never been a security team or sophisticated equipment that could match the Empire. <p align="CENTER">* * * * *<p>

>Imagine my surprise when I discovered that it was not the New Republic who discovered me, but the Empire. As my residence was near the main port, I was constantly checking for any new ships that happened their way into the system, or strangers visiting. Sometimes it required a few hours of searching through the main computer's data banks, but on this day I merely had to look at the videoscreens that showed the arrival of a Victory Class Star Destroyer. The Empire had been on the run for several years after the Battle of Endor, it was even rumored that the Emperor was still alive, but now a clone, but that is the things of fairy tale.
 Although I had never the man who commanded the Destroyer, I had heard of him during my time in the Imperial Navy. Governor 'Walker' Capet, as he was known throughout the Empire was an arrogant, self-centered and dangerous man. He never masked his dislike for the Emperor, and yet in his presence Walker would lick the Emperor's boots clean, along with his cane. Obviously the Governor had not changed his ways, for who would dock an Imperial Star Destroyer in such a well traveled space lane, and not worry about drawing the wrong kind of attention? Boarions held no respect for the fledging Republic, but any number of them could still have sympathies with them.

> 'Do you still require my services, sir?' CP-38's metallic voice shook me from my thoughts.
 'More than you can imagine, droid,' I replied, for I instinctively knew that my time was coming to an end. And then I heard a sound that I recognized immediately, and yet had missed terribly over the past few years. A steady march of metal soles advancing across the deckplates, white armor rattling like skeleton bones. Imperial Stormtroopers. The procession seemed to pour in from either end of the corridor; blasters brandished in my direction.

> 'Hands up,' the captain's cold voice came at me. I obliged immediately and raised my hands. Stormtroopers, here. By the Sith it has been a long time. I looked at their shiny white metal gleaming from the corridor's fluorescent lights and felt a deep sadness I never knew existed, a sadness at the end of the Empire, of my commission, of battles and victories. I nearly smiled when I spoke to the captain, for were I still a Moff, this man would have quaked before me. Steeling myself for the worst I took a deep breath and wore the mask I was accustomed to wearing before my superiors.

> 'Is there a problem, captain?' I said, my voice hissing from behind my clenched teeth. And he did tremble; I felt my chin rise with pride.
 'The problem is you, Moff Jerjerrod,' a new voice added. It was Governor Walker. He was a tall man with broad shoulders and a thick black beard. Both of his eyes had been replaced with synthetic ones that gleamed crimson. 'You are under arrest for crimes against the Empire.'

> A supernova of replies exploded in my head at that moment, Moff

who? What have I done? The Empire? The Empire is dead. But none of them sounded right to my ears. Instead I said: 'And what crimes would those be, Governor Capet?' This time I allowed the smirk to show on my face as I clenched my fists tightly behind my back. The Governor looked startled at my reply, that I did not argue or put on airs had shaken him.

> 'Desertion has always been a punishable offense, Moff Jerjerrod.' Walker signaled to his men to march me away. As the stormtrooper reached for my arm, I turned on him and shook my head, my eyes boring into his reflective lenses. The soldier hesitated.
 I continued to smile. 'One cannot desert what does not exist, Governor. The Empire is dead, with the exception of a few overzealous Admirals who have difficulty evolving. Who ordered this? Pellaeon? Moff Hissa? Or another self proclaimed Grand Admiral? I suppose it doesn't matter, does it?'

> The stormtrooper took hold of my arm to escort me, I could feel the Governor's eyes on me, he was used to having the upper hand, especially when surprise was supposed to be on his side. I turned to look at him a final time. 'A final word, Governor?'
 'And what would that be?'

> 'Fire.'
 His brow furrowed as he pondered the meaning of this until it became self-evident. CP-38's chest plate slide open revealing a standard E-11 BlasTech issue blaster, and several thermal detonators. CP opened fire, felling four troopers before they had a chance to retaliate. I watched as Capet dove for cover at the ensuing laser fight. Red bolts crisscrossed with bright green as the troopers moved forward toward the droid; the fools did not know of the danger of actually connecting with CP. The droid twisted, ensuring that the oncoming blasts hit the thermal detonators that exploded in an ear-splitting, eye-burning explosion. The corridor rocked the remaining troopers to their knees while I did my best to stagger away from the billowing clouds of smoke.

> I could hear the Imperials screaming as some of them discovered they were dying; others were still firing at what now must be a very scattered droid. Already I could hear my speeder approaching, as it was programmed to do once I activated my escape plan with that simple four-letter word. Hoping into the landspeeder, I noticed that I did not escape the blast unscathed, shrapnel had sliced open my back in several spots. I did not have the benefit of stormtrooper armor, which was all it was good for. An image of Jeavar, the Calamari came to mind " I shook it away.
 By the time I reached the warehouse I rented, that housed my personal shuttle, it was already primed and ready to lift off. CP-38 had instantly relayed my commands to the speeder and shuttle before opening fire.

> The crew of the Destroyer wouldn't know what was happening planetside for another few minutes, and by then it would be too late. As the shuttle soared into the heavens and away from Boarion, I could see the Star Destroyer looming above me and it filled my heart with deep sorrow. I thought of the first time I was brought to Endor where the frame of the Death Star orbited the planet. The Emperor's Grand Vizier standing next to me, the green moon glowing beneath us. We were conducting a sight inspection, before returning to the Executor.

> If only I could board that ship one last time, to stand on the bridge and crush my enemies beneath me. But that could not happen, would never happen again. The planet and the remnants of the Empire slipped away from me as I traveled at sub-light, waiting for the computer to spew out the hyperspace coordinates. It had been months since I last checked the ship, and a quick survey showed me that the motivator had shorted. I would have to do the calculations

manually. With a sigh I began the tedious task, it was not a difficult one, every Imperial naval officer learned the manual way, but it would require time, perhaps time that I did not have. For now, the calculations can wait for all I have is time I fear.

> I write this as my ship continues to sail through the Boarion system, com scan has detected no pursuit by the Empire, probably assuming I went into lightspeed the second I left the atmosphere.

>
 Com scan blinks and beeps wildly as it detects the arrival of two Mon Calamari cruisers. I look at the screen, dumfounded. The computer has already established that these are indeed from the Republic, perhaps an anonymous call from the Governor himself, for no other reason than to complicate things for me. Weary and frustrated, I begin punching the final sequence of my flight into the computer. The ships are still several minutes away, and so there is no hurry. I walk to the escape pod this time, never once feeling the urge to run as I had done so many years ago.

> An imperial officer does not run, they walk.
 They do not panic, they remain calm.

> With a hiss of released pressure, I watch as my shuttle spirals away, and the Mon Cal warships arrive to investigate the situation. The Mon Cal will not have me, ever. I am better than they are. And I have been running for long enough. My reflection in the viewscreen stares back at me, streaks of grey running through the cropped cut. For a moment I think I feel the eyes of the dead Calamari on me, and can not shake the feeling.
 One last command and my tale will be done. 'Fire,' I say into the comm unit. The capital ships have flanked either side of my shuttle; they have not noticed the escape pod yet. I need only wait for the shuttle to receive my command. I close my eyes and imagine how it will end; will I see the blast as my own shuttle fires upon this pod? Will I feel the flames rage across my body?

> No, all I can see are those I have killed, and I fear even in death I shall not be free of them. <p> - Moff Jerjerrod<p>

End
file.